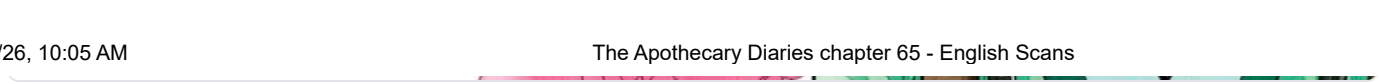
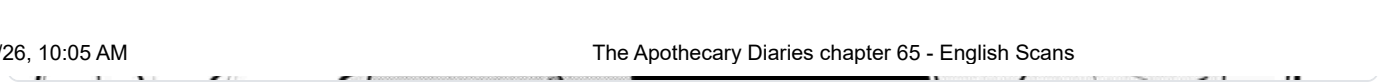
SAY, MAOMAO?
DO YOU KNOW ANYONE THAT COULD SET ME UP WITH A JOB?
A JOB...?
XIAOLAN'S TERM OF SERVICE ENDS IN LESS THAN HALF A YEAR.
BUT HER PARENTS SOLD HER TO THE INNER COURT, SO SHE CAN'T EXACTLY RETURN HOME.
SHE NEEDS NEW CONNECTIONS.
PALACE MAIDS WHOSE TERMS ARE UP...
... OFTEN WIND UP MARRIED OFF.
THAT, OR THEY CAN GET PERMANENT JOBS HERE, IF HIGHER RANKED LADIES-IN-WAITING OR CONSORTS LIKE THEM.
EITHER WAY, THEY RELY ON WHAT CONNECTIONS THEY HAVE.

Chapter 65: Bathing

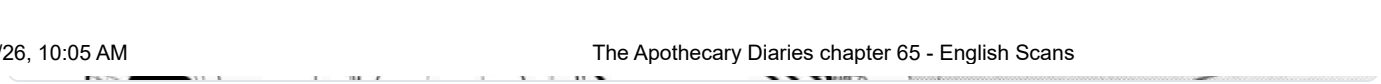
IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN'T HELP HER...
VERDIGRIS IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT WOULD NEVER SAY NO TO A YOUNG, ATTRACTIVE GIRL SEEKING WORK.
THE OLD BIDDY WOULD TAKE HER IN A HEART-BEAT.
MOST IMPOR-TANTLY, HER HONEST NATURE MEANS SHE WOULD BE EASY TO TRAIN.
SHE FUMBLES HER WORDS A BIT, BUT SOME MEN WOULD BE DRAWN TO THAT.
XIAOLAN MAY BE A BIT TOO YOUNG, BUT SHE'S NOT UNAT-TRACTIVE.
...IF YOU CAN'T FIND ANY WORK, THERE IS ONE PLACE I COULD INTRODUCE YOU TO.
FOR SERIOUS ?!
IT MAY SEEM GLAM-OROUS ...
...BUT IT'S NOT A LINE OF WORK CONDUCIVE TO A LONG LIFE.
BUT ENTERTAINING MEN AS A COURTESAN ISN'T FOR THE FAINT OF HEART.



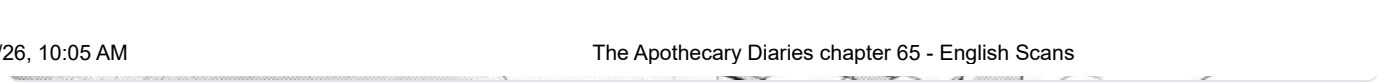
CHRONIC LACK OF SLEEP AND MALNUTRITION.
THE EVER PRESENT RISK OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES.
SOME ATTEMPT, AND FAIL, TO RUN AWAY.
THEIR WRAPPED BODIES FLOATING DOWN THE RIVER SERVE AS A GRAVE WARNING TO WOULD-BE DISSENTERS.
HMMM...
THERE AREN'T MANY PLEASURE HOUSES THAT ARE AS HUMANE TOWARDS THEIR COURTESANS AS VERDIGRIS.
POP
WHATCHA THINKIN' ABOUT?
SHISUI!
JINSHI...
...WOULD MORE THAN LIKELY JUST ROPE XIAOLAN INTO MORE OF HIS TROUBLES.
ARE THERE ANY OTHER OPTIONS?
MAYBE THE QUACK, THEN?

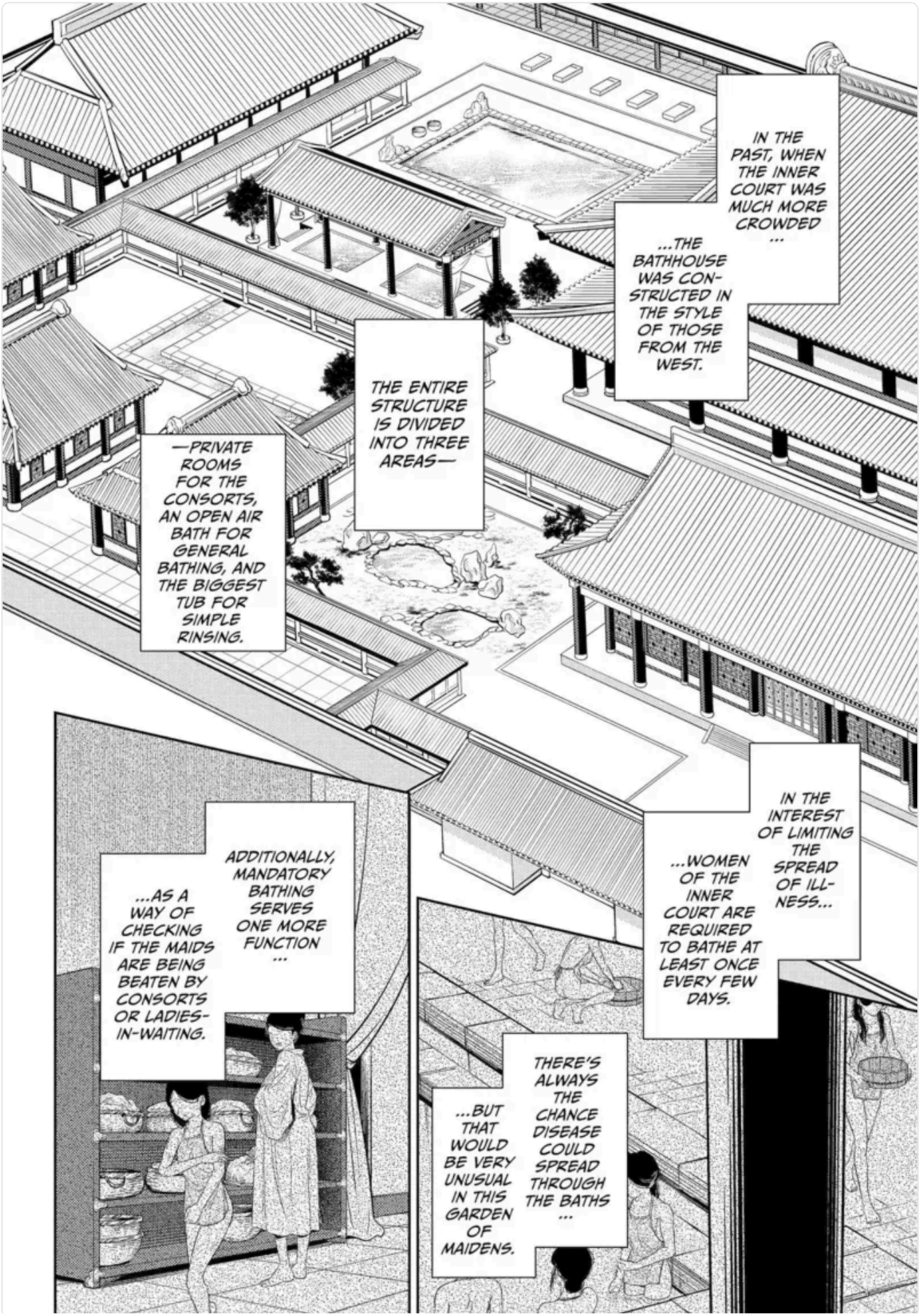


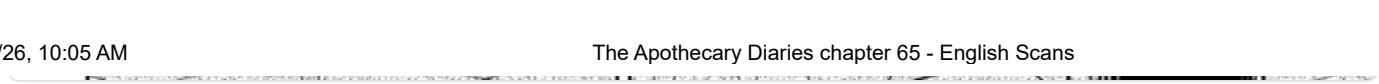
A JOB?
HEY! DO YOU KNOW ANYWHERE A GIRL CAN GET A DECENT JOB?
FOR SERIOUS ?!
THAT'S GREAT! PLEASE, DO TELL!
HMM.
I HAVE SOME IDEAS.
WELL, ONE'S JUST THAT WAY.



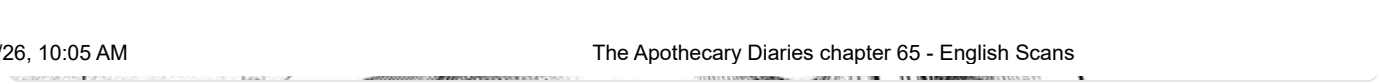
GRIN
WHAT'S OVER THERE?
THE BATHHOUSE ?



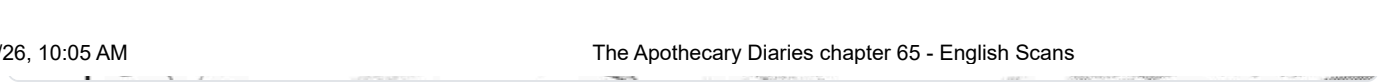

IN THE PAST, WHEN THE INNER COURT WAS MUCH MORE CROWDED ...
...THE BATHHOUSE WAS CONSTRUCTED IN THE STYLE OF THOSE FROM THE WEST.
THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE IS DIVIDED INTO THREE AREAS—
—PRIVATE ROOMS FOR THE CONSORTS, AN OPEN AIR BATH FOR GENERAL BATHING, AND THE BIGGEST TUB FOR SIMPLE RINSING.
IN THE INTEREST OF LIMITING THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS...
...WOMEN OF THE INNER COURT ARE REQUIRED TO BATHE AT LEAST ONCE EVERY FEW DAYS.
ADDITIONALLY, MANDATORY BATHING SERVES ONE MORE FUNCTION ...
...AS A WAY OF CHECKING IF THE MAIDS ARE BEING BEATEN BY CONSORTS OR LADIES-IN-WAITING.
THERE'S ALWAYS THE CHANCE DISEASE COULD SPREAD THROUGH THE BATHS ...
...BUT THAT WOULD BE VERY UNUSUAL IN THIS GARDEN OF MAIDENS.



I'M STILL NOT USED TO TAKING BATHS. NOT EVEN CLOSE.
LIVING ON THE STREETS, YOUR BATHING IS LIMITED TO WASHING OFF WITH A PAIL OF WATER...
...OR EVEN JUST CLEANING YOURSELF WITH A DAMP CLOTH.
IT WAS TYPICAL TO SOAK IN A PROPER TUB IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT...
...BUT BATHING IN AMPLE HOT WATER IS AS LUXURIOUS AS IT GETS.
AT LEAST IT'S NOT TOO FULL THIS TIME OF DAY, HUH?
SHISUI'S FEATURES ARE SO YOUNG, AND YET...
...IT SEEMS CLOTHING JUST SERVES TO SLIM HER FIGURE DOWN.
GAWP
GAWP

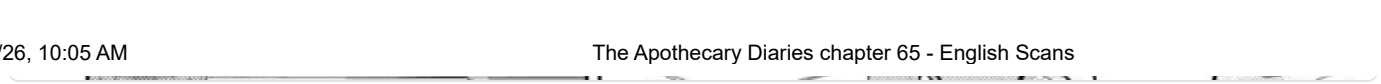


BATH TIME!
SHISUI? UM, WHY ARE WE HERE?
AH!
HANG ON!
TP TP TP
SPROING
SPLOOSH
UH—
HOT HOT HOOOT!
SPLSH

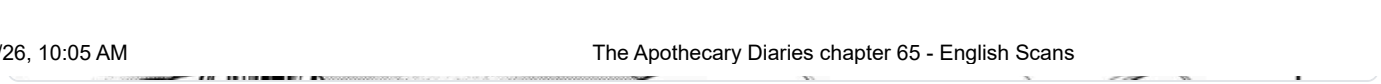


HEH HEH HEH. AH, I ALWAYS COME BATHE LATER IN THE DAY.
YOU DIDN'T KNOW?
THE WATER IS SUPER HOT ABOUT THIS HOUR.
GAAAH!
THE WATER IS RE-FRESHED DAILY.
THE EUNUCHS POUR IN SCALDING HOT WATER ...
...AND IT GRADUALLY COOLS DOWN TO A PROPER TEMPER-ATURE.
WHEN THE WEATHER IS WARM LIKE THIS...
...THE FEW WOMEN WHO ARRIVE THIS EARLY ONLY COME TO AVOID LARGE CROWDS.
EITHER WAY!
YOU NEED TO WASH OFF BEFORE YOU GET IN THE TUB! DUH!

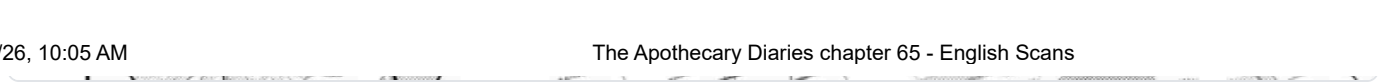
WUZZAT?
SURE.
GIVE ME SOME, WOULD YOU, MAOMAO?
?
SHAMPOO.
SPLSH
FWM
FWM
THEN KEEP THEM CLOSED.
NNGH!
AAAGH! WHAT IS THIS, MY EYES STING!



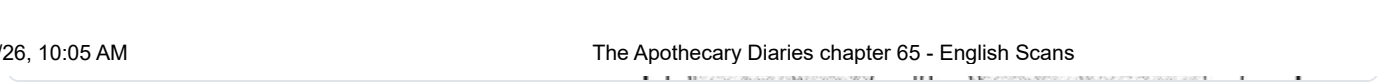
IT'S NO SWEAT IF YOU JUST KEEP A BUCKET OF COLD WATER TO COOL YOUR HEAD WITH.
REALLY ?
SURE, BUT IT FEELS SO GOOD!
UM, ISN'T IT REALLY HOT IN THERE?
PHEW ...
I SERIOUSLY DON'T GET IT...
...SO I SUPPOSE BATHING IN COLD WATER COMES MORE NATURALLY TO HER.
XIAOLAN IS FROM A FARMING VILLAGE ...
OVER THERE?
JUST LOOK OVER THERE.
ANYWAY! WHY ARE WE HERE, AGAIN? WHAT ABOUT YOUR CON-NECTIONS?



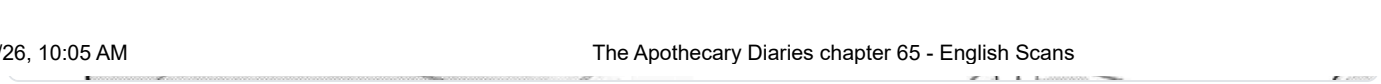
THERE? WHERE THE LADIES-IN-WAITING AND CONSORTS GO?
HANG ON! ARE WE EVEN ALLOWED IN?!
SHOULD BE FINE.
YEAH! COME ON!
HUH?!
HEY—
JUST COPY ME.



HUH? SEE WHAT?
TUG
AH. I SEE.
DU
SEE?
UUN
YES!
OH, ARE YOU NEW HERE?
FIRM PRESSURE, PLEASE.
UNDER-STOOD!



GLG
GLG
OF COURSE.
AHH. A LITTLE TO THE RIGHT.
WOOOAH
NOD
NOD
HURRY UP, YOU TWO!
RUB
RUB



I'M GUESSING THE EMPEROR HASN'T TAKEN EITHER OF THESE TWO.
IF HE HAD, THEY WOULD BE MUCH MORE CAUTIOUS AND ON THE LOOKOUT FOR POTENTIAL HARASS-MENT.
THEY WOULDN'T ASK MAIDS THEY'VE NEVER MET FOR MASSAGES.
AH!
UNSHAVEN ARM HAIR! SHE MISSED SOME!
I... CAN'T IGNORE THIS.
FIDGET
FIDGET
BORN AND RAISED IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT

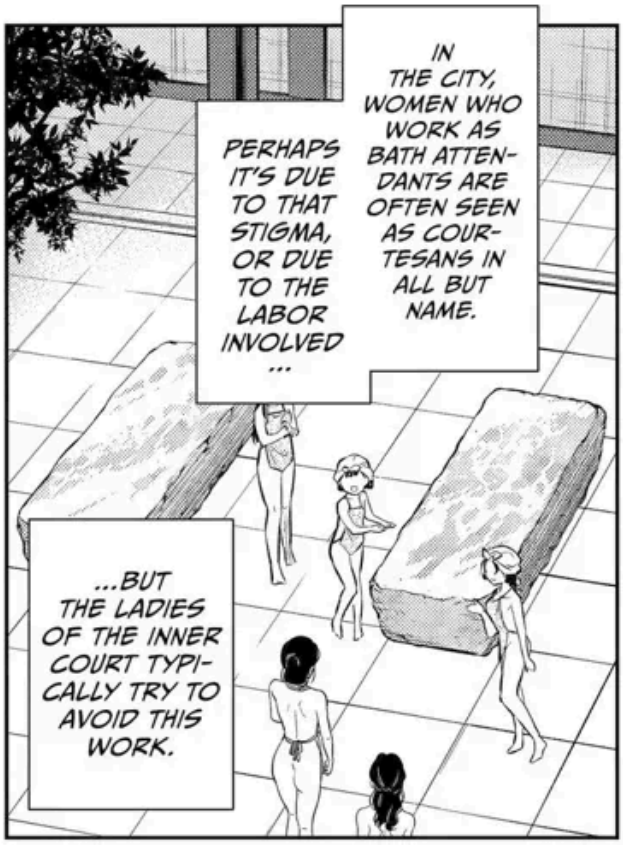
IT DOES, BUT IT'S MUCH BETTER THAN A DULL RAZOR.
DOES IT HURT?
IF YOU FEEL ANYTHING STRANGE HAPPEN TO YOUR SKIN, TELL ME.
THING

THAT'S HOW IT'S DONE IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, AT LEAST.
ONCE THAT'S DONE, BE SURE TO APPLY A HIGH-QUALITY BALM
SLIDE THE THREAD OVER CLEAN SKIN, AND IT ENTWINES WITH THE SOFT HAIRS, PLUCKING THEM OUT.

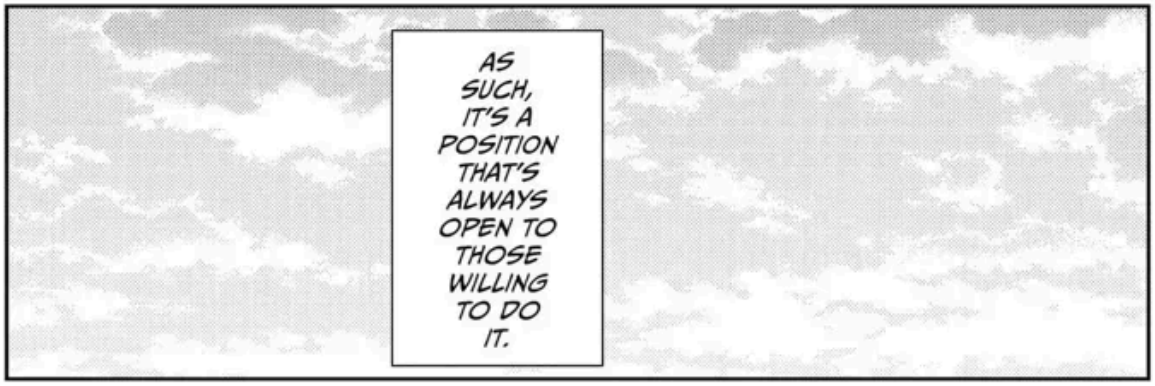
UM...
...THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, I SUPPOSE.
GLANCE
WHEN WILL YOU BE HERE AGAIN?
HMM. I'LL BE SURE TO KEEP A WATCH ON MY SKIN.

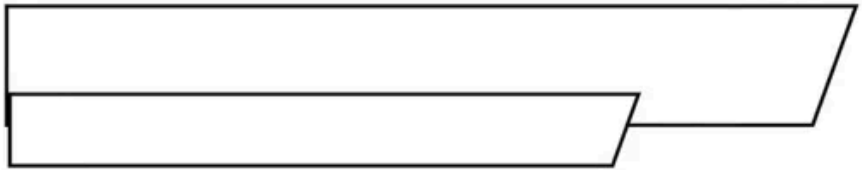
ALL RIGHT, GOOD.
THERE WAS ANOTHER LADY-IN-WAITING GIVING MASSAGES HERE...
...BUT APPARENTLY SOMEONE SCOOPED HER UP. SHE LEFT THE INNER COURT A FEW DAYS AGO.
GRIN
SEE YOU AGAIN.
RIGHT!
WE'LL BE WAITING!
THAT FACE SAYS, "IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY CONNECTIONS, YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN."

CONSORTS ARE OFTEN FAR OUT OF REACH...
...BUT THE BATH IS A RARE PLACE WHERE APPROACHING THEM IS NONE TOO DIFFICULT.


IN THE CITY, WOMEN WHO WORK AS BATH ATTENDANTS ARE OFTEN SEEN AS COURTESANS IN ALL BUT NAME.
PERHAPS IT'S DUE TO THAT STIGMA, OR DUE TO THE LABOR INVOLVED ...
...BUT THE LADIES OF THE INNER COURT TYPICALLY TRY TO AVOID THIS WORK.

CAN YOU DO US, NEXT?
SURE!


AS SUCH, IT'S A POSITION THAT'S ALWAYS OPEN TO THOSE WILLING TO DO IT.

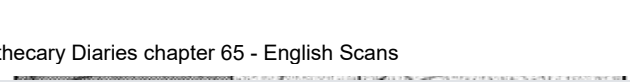


YUM! SO GOOD!
NO MATTER WHAT, SWEET TREATS TURN HER MOOD RIGHT AROUND. SHE'S EASY TO PLEASE.

I'M SURE.
ARE YOU REEEALLY SURE I CAN HAVE YOURS, TOO?!

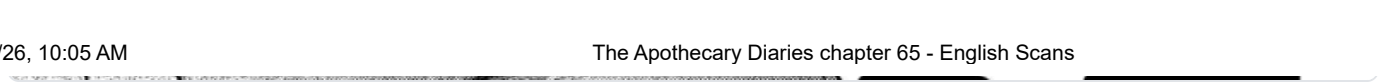
STILL, THOUGH.
MAKING ACTUAL CONNECTIONS ISN'T SO EASY, HUH?

WE CONTINUED GIVING MASSAGES FOR SOME TIME...
...AND RECEIVED REWARDS FOR OUR WORK, HERE AND THERE.

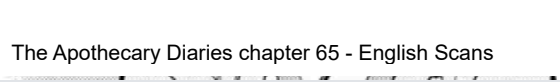


BEFORE YOUR TERM IS UP, FIND A CONSORT THAT FAVORS YOU...
...AND LET HER KNOW YOU'RE ALMOST FINISHED.
EVEN IF SHE DOESN'T TAKE YOU INTO HER FOLD...
...SHE MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET YOUR TERM EXTENDED.
WILL THAT REALLY WORK?
EVEN IF IT DOESN'T ...
HERE.
YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF GOODS TO SELL OFF FOR QUICK CASH!
I GOT THIS!
AH HAH!
NICE, HUH?
HOW SHREWD.

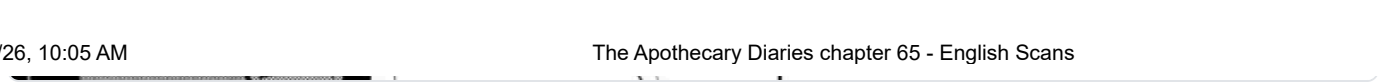
...I EXPECTED THAT I WOULD QUICKLY GARNER DISAPPROVAL IN THE JADE PALACE.
GIVEN THAT I WAS CARING FOR OTHER CONSORTS...
...I MADE A SHOW OF WORKING WITH THEM IN THE BATHS ONCE EVERY TWO DAYS.
FROM THEN ON...
...THE CONSORTS AND LADIES-IN-WAITING IN THE BATHS SPEAK VERY CANDIDLY.
TRUE. WITH EVERYONE LETTING THEIR HAIR DOWN, SO TO SPEAK ...
CONSORT GYOKUYO REALLY IS AS UNFLAPPABLE AS THEY COME.
EASY GOING
OH?
YOU MUST HEAR THE JUICIEST STORIES THERE!
YOU JUST HAVE TO TELL ME SOME TIME!
THEY'RE GOSSIPING ABOUT THE CHILD'S SEX, AND WHEN IT MIGHT BE BORN.
THE PERCEPTIVE CONSORTS CAN ALREADY TELL SHE'S PREGNANT AGAIN.
IN FACT, SHE HERSELF HAS BEEN A TOPIC OF CONVERSATION IN THE BATHS.



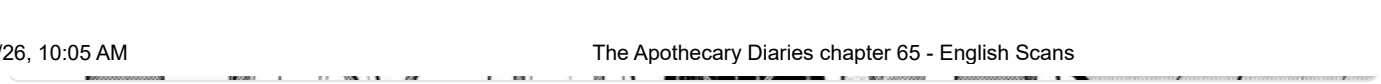
THEY WONDERED IF CONSORT LIHUA MIGHT BE PREGNANT, AS WELL.
RUMOR HAS TAKEN HOLD THAT EVEN CONSORT LOULAN MAY BE PREGNANT.
SHE'S BECOME KNOWN FOR HER UNIQUE AND STRIKING WARDROBE ...
...BUT MORE RECENTLY, SHE'S STUCK TO SOFT AND FLUFFY CLOTHING. AND SHE HASN'T BEEN GOING OUT MUCH, EITHER.
CONSORT LOULAN ARRIVED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR...
...AND THE EIGHTH MONTH OF THIS YEAR IS ALREADY DRAWING TO A CLOSE.
SHE IS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL CONSORTS, WITH NO SHORTAGE OF EYES ON HER. IT'S NOT LIKE THE EMPEROR COULD SIMPLY PASS HER OVER.
FEELS LIKE THERE'S BEEN MORE PEOPLE IN THE INNER COURT LATELY, HUH?
IF ALL OF THESE RUMORS ARE TRUE, THEN THREE OF THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS ARE ALL PREGNANT.
I'M TORN BETWEEN CALLING THAT AUSPICIOUS AND CALLING IT DANGEROUS.



MORE EUNUCHS WERE BROUGHT IN, AS WELL AS LADIES-IN-WAITING.
AREN'T THEY NOT ALLOWED TO MAKE MORE EUNUCHS, THOUGH?
YES, BUT THOSE ARE FORMER SLAVES.
THERE ARE STILL TRIBES THAT CAPTURE FOREIGNERS, CASTRATING AND ENSLAVING THEM.
THESE ONES COULD'VE ESCAPED FROM THAT, OR MAYBE BEEN RESCUED?
THERE'S SOME THIRTY OF THEM, SO THEY COULD'VE BEEN RESCUED AFTER A BIG BATTLE.
FOR A BUG-OBSESSED ECCENTRIC, SHISUI SURE IS KEEN.
YEAH.
OH, YEESH!
BUT ALSO, I HEARD ONE OF THEM WAS SUPER HANDSOME! I REALLY WANNA SEE!
MAYBE I'LL GET A CHANCE WHEN THEY HEAT UP THE BATHS?

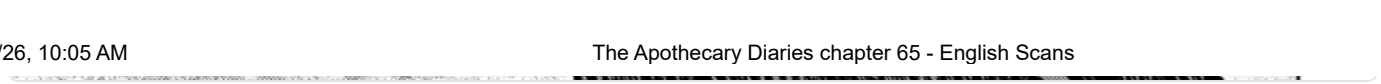


I SO WANNA SEE! ♥
I SUPPOSE WHETHER THEY COME EQUIPPED WITH EQUIP-MENT...
... DOESN'T EXACTLY MATTER TO A PURE MAIDEN LIKE HER.
YOU REALIZE HE'S A EUNUCH, YES?
SO? THEY CAN STILL BE HAND-SOME!
WELL, I SAY ALL THAT...
...BUT NONE OF THEM COULD HOLD A CANDLE TO SIR JINSHI!
PFF
MAOMAO?! YOU OKAY?
I'M FINE.
KOFF KOFF



WAH!
SHNG
ON OFFICIAL CONSORT BUSINESS!
OH YEAH! YOU SPEND A LOT OF TIME WITH HIM, DON'T YOU?

NOTHING!
AND NOTHING MORE. NOTHING MORE!
THAT WAS A FROG.
A FROG!
WIPE
WIPE
WIPE



SIGH...
I HAVEN'T RUN INTO HIM SINCE WE RETURNED FROM THE TRIP.
BUT... HE SHOULD BE CALLING ON ME ANY DAY NOW.
...HM?
CONSORT LISHU?
WHAT'S A PRINCIPAL CONSORT DOING IN THE BATHS?